

He scowled darkly as he read it. From a notorious gambler, it announced that unless within forty-eight hours a certain note was paid it would be presented to the man whose forged signature it bore—John Martin.

"Everything depends on getting Terhune away with me and watching my opportunity," mused the bachelor. "I must get one thousand dollars or I am ruined—worse, I must become a hunted criminal. Ah, I have it!" and his bed eyes sparkled with cunning.

"Let us take a little stroll, Terhune," he suggested as, apparently casually, he later met his intended victim on the street near his hotel. "What do you say to a show for the evening?"

"Previous engagement," replied Ralph, glancing at his watch and counting the minutes until eight o'clock, when he was due to spend the evening with Eunice Martin.

"Time for a game of billiards, at least," pressed Beale.

"Oh, yes; I have a full hour of leisure."

"Come on, then."

Beale led the way to a reputable billiard parlor, and they were soon engaged in a preliminary game with the ivory spheres.

Beale disguised the fact that he was an expert at the game. He made it interesting for his opponent by some clever manipulations and Ralph's interest so deepened that he threw off his coat and cuffs and became absorbed in watching his adversary.

Beale allowed Ralph to win, and kept up a clatter of talk. As it neared eight o'clock they left the place. Suddenly Ralph halted upon the public street.

"I declare," he exclaimed, "I left my cuffs in the rack back at the billiard hall."

"Shall I go back with you or wait for you?" inquired Beale, courteously.

"Thanks, but I shall have to hurry

to get to my appointment," explained Ralph.

His face was grave and anxious all the time later while he sat conversing with Eunice or listening to her piano playing at the Martin home. As he arose to leave, she looked appealingly into his face.

"Ralph," she said, "what is troubling you this evening? Something, I know. Won't you tell me what it is?"

He could not resist the wistful appeal. He told Eunice of the loss of his cuffs. She realized how sincerely he deplored the loss of her first gift to him.

"I have offered a liberal reward at the billiard hall for their recovery," said Ralph. "I cannot forgive my forgetfulness in leaving them. Some one has appropriated them."

"Never mind, Ralph," Eunice said, sweetly. "They were of little intrinsic value, and I will give you another pair."

Ralph did not leave the trustful girl in an altogether easy frame of mind. He did not tell her of the safe combination which he had scribbled one of the cuffs. For the life of him he could not recall those numerals.

This put him in a state of anxiety, and to some decided inconvenience. Fortunately no business came in that required reference to the contents of the safe, but large amounts were paid and important documents received, and these Ralph locked up in a strong tin box and slept with it under his pillow each night.

Mr. Martin returned at the end of ten days. He looked surprised when Ralph made his report. He opened the safe. Then he turned upon his bookkeeper with a dark, suspicious face.

"I left a package containing twelve hundred in cash in this safe when I went away, and it is gone," he said, sat down grimly, wrote out a check for a month's salary and added: "Terhune, you are discharged."